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AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS

Claims 1-27 (Canceled).

28. (Currently Amended) An unwinding device for unwinding reels of web material comprising a rotating element with supports for at least two reels and a splicing member to join a first web material coming from an expiring reel to an initial free end of a second web material wound on a new reel; wherein at least one mechanical member is associated with each support of said supports to retain the initial free end of the new reel disposed on the support; wherein said at least one mechanical member is torsionally connected to a respective support before said splicing member joins said first web material to said initial free end of said second web material, and, is torsionally released from the respective support after said splicing member joins said first web material to said initial free end of said second web material, thereafter said at least one mechanical member being connected to said support and in a neutral position which does not interfere with unwinding of said new reel.

29. (Previously Presented) Device as claimed in claim 28, wherein said at least one mechanical member comprises at

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least one arm extending radially from said support and at least one retaining element carried by a free end of said at least one arm, said retaining element extending substantially parallel to an axis of the new reel disposed on said support.

30. (Previously Presented) Device as claimed in claim 29, wherein said retaining element is a roller.

31. (Previously Presented) Device as claimed in claim 30, wherein said roller is supported idle on said arm.

32. (Previously Presented) Device as claimed in claim 30, wherein said arm is adjustable in length.

33. (Canceled).

34. (Previously Presented) Device as claimed in claim 29, wherein said retaining element is movable with respect to the arm.

35. (Previously Presented) Device as claimed in claim 34, wherein said retaining element cooperates with an actuator which controls withdrawal of the retaining element from the new reel disposed on said support when the second web material wound thereon is joined to the first web material of the expiring reel, withdrawal releasing the retaining element from the reel.

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36. (Previously Presented) Device as claimed in claim 28, wherein said mechanical member comprises an elastic element.

37. (Previously Presented) Device as claimed in claim 36, wherein said elastic element is connectable reversibly at one end to be released when the initial free end of the second web material of the new reel is to be joined to the first web material.

38. (Previously Presented) Device as claimed in claim 36, wherein two hooking members of said elastic element are associated with each of said supports, one of said hooking members cooperating with an actuator which controls release of the elastic element.

39. (Previously Presented) Device as claimed in claim 28, wherein said splicing member comprises a roller and a cutting blade to cut the first web material coming from the expiring reel.

40. (Previously Presented) Device as claimed in claim 28, further comprising a ply-bonding unit.

41. (Currently Amended) Method for continuously feeding a web material wound on a reel to a processing machine comprising:

- feeding a first web material at a feed speed from a first reel;
- carrying in rotation a second reel with a second web material;
- when the feed speed of the first web material is essentially same as a peripheral speed of the second reel, joining the first web material to the second web material and interrupting the first web material upstream of a splicing area between the first web material and the second web material;

wherein an initial free end of the second web material is held adherent to the second reel, until splicing of the first web material and the second web material, by at least one mechanical member which rotates with said second reel; wherein said at least one mechanical member is torsionally connected with a support of said second reel until said joining of the first web material to the second web material; and said at least one mechanical member is torsionally disconnected from said support during splicing; and carrying said at least one mechanical member to an idle position after said splicing.

42. (Previously Presented) Method as claimed in claim 41, further comprising applying an adhesive means to an

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external surface of the second reel in a withdrawn position, in a direction of rotation of the second reel, with respect to a position in which said mechanical member holds the initial free end of the second web material.

43. (Previously Presented) Method as claimed in claim 42, further comprising pressing together the first web material and the second web material at a level of said adhesive means to cause said splicing of said first web material and said second web material.

44. (Previously Presented) Method as claimed in claim 41, wherein said first web material and said second web material each comprise at least one ply of tissue paper.

45. (Previously Presented) Method as claimed in claim 44, wherein each of said at least one ply of tissue paper has a weight per unit of surface ranging from 15 to 60 g/m².

46. (Previously Presented) Method as claimed in claim 41, wherein said first web material and said second web material comprise more than one ply and wherein plies of an end portion of the first web material are joined together before said splicing to the second web material.

47. (Canceled).

48. (Currently Amended) Method as claimed in claim 41, wherein ~~said mechanical member is torsionally connected~~

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~~to a respective reel and said mechanical member is released from said respective reel during said splicing of the first web material and the second web material, withdrawing the mechanical member~~ is withdrawn from an external surface of the respective reel.

49. (Previously Presented) Method as claimed in claim 41, wherein the initial free end of the second web material is held by an elastic mechanical member.

50. (Previously Presented) Method as claimed in claim 49, wherein one end of the elastic mechanical member is released during said splicing of the first web material and the second web material.

51. (Previously Presented) Method as claimed in claim 41, further comprising a pressure member acting on a surface of said second reel at least in an area between said mechanical retaining member and an area of reciprocal adhesion between the first web material and the second web material.

52. (Previously Presented) Method as claimed in claim 51, further comprising applying a strip of double-sided adhesive tape to an external surface of said second reel, in said area of reciprocal adhesion.

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53. (Currently Amended) An unwinding device for unwinding reels of web material comprising:

- a rotating element with supports for at least two reels, said rotating element additionally carrying at least two rollers;

- a splicing member to join a first web material coming from an expiring reel to an initial free end of a second web material wound on a new reel;

- at least one mechanical member associated with each support of said supports, to retain the initial free end of the new reel, wherein said at least one mechanical member is torsionally connected to a respective support before said splicing member joins said first web material to said initial free end of said second web material, and wherein said at least one mechanical member is torsionally released from the respective support after said splicing member joins said first web material to said initial free end of said second web material, thereafter said at least one mechanical member being connected to said support and in a neutral position which does not interfere with unwinding of said new reel;

- a ply-bonding unit, including ply-bonding wheels for joining plies of the first web material together stably

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before splicing to the second web material, said ply-bonding wheels cooperating alternatively with a respective one of said rollers.

54. (Previously Presented) Device according to claim 53, wherein said rotating element includes a pair of arms supporting said rollers.

55. (Previously Presented) Device according to claim 54, wherein said rotating element includes a further pair of arms carrying said supports.

56. (Previously Presented) Device according to claim 53, wherein said ply-bonding unit is constructed and arranged to stably join together the plies of said first web material coming from said expiring reel before said splicing to the second web material coming from the new reel.

57. (Previously Presented) Device according to claim 56, wherein said ply-bonding unit is arranged to act upstream of the splicing member.

58. (Currently Amended) An unwinding device for unwinding reels of web material comprising:

- a rotating element with supports for at least two reels;

- a splicing member to join a first web material coming from an expiring reel to an initial free end of a second web material wound on a new reel;

- at least one mechanical member associated with each of said supports, to retain the initial free end of the new reel disposed on a respective one of said supports;

- wherein each mechanical member comprises an elastic element having ~~one~~ a first end fixed to the respective one of said supports and a second end reversibly connectable to the respective one of said supports by a hooking member associated with the respective one of the supports, said hooking member cooperating with an actuator which controls release of the elastic element when the initial free end of the second web material is to be joined to the first web material, wherein said actuator disengages said second end of said elastic element upon said splicing member joining said first web material to said initial free end of said second web material.

59. (Previously Presented) Device according to claim 58, wherein each said elastic element includes two hooking members associated with each of said supports.

60. (Previously Presented) Device according to claim 58, wherein a first end of each elastic element is fixed to

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a first disc or arm integral with the respective one of said supports and a second end of said elastic element is reversibly connectable to a second disc or arm integral with said respective one of said supports.

61. (Previously Presented) Device according to claim 59, wherein a first end of each elastic element is fixed to a first disc or arm integral with the respective one of said supports and a second end of said elastic element is reversibly connectable to a second disc or arm integral with said respective one of said supports.